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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 017059

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/29/2016

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SO CI](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: RUMOR CONTROL: FIDEL SAID TO UNDERGO NEW OPERATION

Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: As would be expected, Havana is awash in rumors over the health of Fidel Castro. One, from a dissident who has provided accurate information in the past, says Castro underwent follow-up surgery between August 24 and 26, but that no other details are available. Our suspicion that Castro is being treated at Havana's elite "CIMEQ" hospital is strengthened, following an AmCit's report on a visit by GOC officials to his rented house, facing CIMEQ. Dissidents are absorbing with great interest other reports and rumors about Castro, including a statement from the Cuban Liberal Union in Madrid that Castro has colon cancer. Some of the dictator's relatives in exile have reportedly discussed Castro suffering from pancreatic cancer, while a separate rumor posits that Castro is receiving chemotherapy and will soon see his hair and beard fall out. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Cuban dissident Gerardo Sanchez, brother of Elizardo Sanchez of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, told Poloff on August 27 that he had heard that between August 24 and 26, Fidel Castro underwent surgery for his undisclosed medical condition. This would be a follow-up to the surgery he had at the end of July, prompting the July 31 "proclamation" that put Raul Castro in charge. Gerardo Sanchez, who is widely connected and has provided accurate information to USINT in the past, said he heard the same rumor from three sources: one in the Health Ministry, another in the Catholic Church and another who is close to a member of Castro's personal bodyguard.

¶3. (C) The Cuban Government has not disclosed where Castro is being treated, but the theory that he is at Havana's elite CIMEQ hospital is strengthened by what our RSO heard recently regarding an Amcit businessman living in a rental house in front of CIMEQ. According to the Amcit, who makes frequent visits to Havana, GOC officials stopped by the house on August 24 and asked a neighbor about the foreigner staying there. The move may reflect a heightened security environment.

¶4. (C) Cuba's dissident community is abuzz over other statements and unsubstantiated rumors connected with Castro's incapacitation. Of keen interest is a report from Madrid dated August 27 that quotes Antonio Guedes, vice president of the Cuban Liberal Union, as saying that according to sources that the Union cannot identify, doctors are treating Castro for colon cancer and that for the GOC, this marks "the beginning of the end." Sources close to some of Castro's relatives in exile have referred to speculation of pancreatic cancer, which is viewed as more aggressive than some other forms. Separately, a rumor is circulating that Castro is receiving chemotherapy and that his hair and beard will soon start to fall out.

COMMENT

15. (C) The regime does not calm the rumor mill with its periodic announcements that Fidel Castro is recuperating. He could be at CIMEQ, where VIPs are treated, or at a special clinic at his "Ground Zero" estate in the western Havana suburb of Siboney, which is close to CIMEQ in any case. Our best guess, putting together all the rumors and the film footage from Hugo Chavez's August 13-14 visit, is that Fidel Castro has one or more terminal conditions that will prevent him from returning to his hyperactive-leader role. Our best estimate of Raul Castro is that he consults with Fidel regularly, or at least understands that he has to go through the motions of consulting with him as long as Fidel is alive. PARMLY